

WitnessKit 1 Faith and Reason

Class 10

Quests for the Historic Jesus, and Beginning to Think About Miracles

The Research Time Lag Problem

I am old enough to have seen wave after wave after wave of new skepticism.

Why is this? Why did we see “God is dead” on the cover of a prominent magazine thirty plus years ago, and films like THE DA VINCI CODE being treated as profound? Why does one tiny fragment of one parchment written hundreds of years after the Bible, but that contradicts the Bible, receive sensational news reporting?

The Research Time Lag Problem

New stuff sells.

Eternal truths seem to be old.

Marketing drives the culture.

We need to study how to defend our faith, to counter the effects of marketing.

- Truth remains truth.
- Marketing of novel ideas obscures eternal truth--In a sort of pink and purple fog, with glitter and perfume.
- Properly defending the faith blows the fog away.
- Apologetics—the study of defending the faith—builds a bridge from popular culture to truth.

The Problem of Novelty Affects More Than Marketing.

This same **novelty emphasis** is true for **research to obtain advanced degrees.**

- Novelty is a requirement for the document to “count” toward a degree.
- Eternal truths are at a disadvantage for novelty.
- Outlandish ideas have a distinct novelty advantage.

The novel stuff looks sophisticated.

Proponents of novelty get advanced degrees. They look like experts.

- Research takes time.

- The people who believe in eternal truths must do time-consuming research

- to reveal the flaws in the recently published novel stuff.

The novel stuff looks sophisticated.

Thus, a time lag exists between the publication of critical but outlandish scholarship,

- And the honest answers to it.
- By that time, at least some of the public believes the wrong ideas.

We need apologetics to counter the novelty effect in scholarship.

Along with our study of apologetics, we want to

- ▣ set a guard over our hearts, and
- ▣ a skepticism of skepticism in our minds,

so that we do not fall prey to the next set of
“exciting new discoveries” the critics publish.

▣ Nowhere is this more obvious than in **the three quests for the historical Jesus.**

The Quests for the Historic Jesus

- The title, *The Quest for the Historic Jesus*, sounds really good. The title sounds like a quest all of us should pursue. However, the word “historic” contains a catch. In keeping with the 19th century German tradition, “historic” is a buzz-word meaning “miracles don’t count as history.” So the quests for the historic Jesus assume that the miracles in the Bible did not happen. They look for a merely human Jesus.
- Three such skeptical quests have received prominence, and are treated as legitimate scholarship in the secular world. Secularists just don’t know where the real scholarship is found.

From last class we remember...



Higher criticism was based on the idea that miracle accounts are never historical.

- This is a philosophical assumption, and it is a **CLOSED** assumption. It assumes that God never intervenes in history in any way.
- It assumes at most a Deist view of God—that if there is a god, at most he might have set the universe in motion, and that is all.

What is wrong with Deism?

- Deism has one profound difficulty. If God is intelligent enough and powerful enough to create the universe and set it in motion, why is He assumed helpless to do lesser miracles?
- Deism may be comfortable as a way to be somewhat religious in settings where religion is down-played, but it is not the conclusion reason draws when all the data are in.
- In contrast, the Bible treats miracles as real but rare.

Psalm 115:3,16

- ³ But our God *is* in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.
- ¹⁶ The heaven, *even* the heavens, *are* the LORD'S; But the earth He has given to the children of men. (NKJV)
- Here we see that God is able to intervene when He pleases, and that ordinarily, the earth is under the effects of human actions. We see cause and effect due to human actions.

The message of the whole Bible is that “what God pleases” is always good.

- This Psalm says God is able to do whatever He pleases, and He does so.
- This Psalm also implies that under normal operation of the world, people make decisions that create cause and effect. *16 The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD'S; But the earth He has given to the children of men.*
- People's decisions have real impact on the world, because God has given that power to humans.

The Bible's Attitude Regarding Miracles

- We **see** human action and its effects.
- We **don't see** God's actions in heaven. We need His word to be able to give proper credit to His actions as causing effects in this world. Thus, miracles that are obviously from God **and** visibly different from normal operation of the world, are **rare**.
- Yet “God **DOES** whatever He pleases.” His actions are ongoing, and **DO** effect the world—mostly in ways we take for granted or cannot discern.

Review from Lesson 1:

The Bible attributes to God Many NORMAL principles— “He gives to all life, breath, and all things.” Acts 17:25 (NKJV)

¹⁷ He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together. Colossians 1:17 (NLT)

We do not notice these things as miracle, because they are hidden behind the normal operation of the world. Yet they are miracle, because only God can do them. He is the ultimate cause of all other physical existence.

The Higher Critics and Miracle

- The Higher Critics typically do not count anything as miracle.
- They are religious, but not in a vibrant way, because they do not recognize God's Presence in reality.
- The Quests for the Historic Jesus typically follow their approaches in their search—although the latest search is a bit more diverse—and allows for the Deity of Jesus as a possibility.

The Quests for the Historic Jesus

- Followed the thinking of these various forms of “higher” criticism—the novel ideas in vogue for research.
- We need to understand how their work affected Christianity in America in the 20th and 21st centuries.
- We need to choose our church loyalties carefully, and understanding these matters can help. It is not easy to choose the best church, and there are many pitfalls along the way.

From our last class: Background Information...

- **Lower Criticism** is also called **textual criticism**. It studies the words and letters of the documents and tries to learn the original wording and the time of writing. Our classes followed its methods in looking at the text of the New Testament and the canon.
- **Higher criticism** is an attempt to evaluate the text and its authorship and time of writing, based upon various extraneous assumptions and literary methods.

Higher Criticism can be broken into several different eras and methodologies.

1. **Source Criticism**
 2. **Form Criticism**
 3. **Redaction Criticism**
 4. **Historical Criticism**
 5. **Genre/Literary Criticism**
 6. **Viewpoint Criticism**
1. **1700s-1800s**, Germany, JEDP, &Q, Mark, Proto-Luke.
 2. **1918**, Germany, Individual documents of OT were compiled and edited in 586 BC, post exile.
 3. **1st half of 20th century**, Differentiates between originals and “edits” by church.
 4. **1900s Judaism, 1970s 3rd quest**, Looks at historical setting.
 5. **1970s**, US, Scandinavia, Britain, Looks at the literary whole and the story and the poetry.
 6. **Present**, Postmodern, Looks at the documents from the readers’ points of view: Feminist criticism, Third world criticism, Afro-centric criticism, liberation theology, etc.

The Quests for the Historic Jesus

- Followed the thinking of these various forms of “higher” criticism.
- The quests applied the techniques of higher criticism to the records of the life of Christ in the Gospels—with the goal of finding the real (human) Jesus.
- Once again, the word “historic” was assumed to eliminate miracles as possibilities. Thus, no miracle accounts were treated as historic by the early quests.

The Quests for the Historic Jesus

Facts

We can be confident in the Biblical Jesus by understanding the facts about the 3 quests for the historical Jesus.

- **Fact 1: The assumptions pre-set the conclusions.**
- **Fact 2: The conclusions produce reactions among the congregations.**
- **Fact 3: The Bible documents are more helpful than the critics.**

Quest Number 1, Fact 1: Assumptions Pre-Set Conclusions.

- The first quest for the historical Jesus was largely due to 1800s German rejection of anything miraculous. It followed the same path as the documentary debunking of the books of Moses.
- If the miracles in Moses' writings caused those writings to be called "myth," then what did the miracles in the Gospels do?

Quest Number 1, Fact 1: Assumptions Pre-Set Conclusions.

- A German critic named D. F. Strauss (1835 publication) defined everything in the gospels that was supernatural or legendary as mythological, and anything strictly natural as historical. So the original search for the historical Jesus was what was left after miracles were ruled out of bounds.

(“Christ and Miracles” by William Lane Craig, in TO EVERYONE AN ANSWER, by Beckwith, Craig, and Moreland, 2004)

Quest Number 1, Fact 1:

Assumptions → Results

- Very little was left.
- There is a reason for that. ***Miracles are a means God used to communicate in the Bible***—to let people know Who was speaking. If His communication is rejected, it is really hard to find His Messiah.
- Jesus said, “If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, ***believe the works***, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.”—John 10:37-38

Quest Number 1, Fact 1: Assumptions Pre-Set Conclusions.

- The First Quest assumed the miracle accounts in the New Testament were myths. It threw those portions out as unhistorical.
- The First Quest used “form criticism” to try to obtain the original, oral form of the gospels prior to church history.
- The First Quest took place in the late 1800s through the turn of the 20th century.

Quest Number 1, Fact 1: Assumptions

- Note that trying to find the original ORAL form of the New Testament documents is much more an exercise in imagination than trying to find the original written words and letters.
- The First Quest thought the original oral form was transformed into legend/myth by the time it was written down.

Quest Number 1, Fact 1: Assumptions

- We have seen that this “myth” idea is unreasonable—that written manuscript copies are in existence from very early—the earliest fragment possibly as close as 15 years to the writing of the Gospel of John.
- We have seen that the other three Gospels were written by the mid 60s AD, about thirty years after the resurrection, and too close to events to be legend. Eyewitnesses were still alive as the New Testament was being written.

(A current footnote to this process...)

- (Scholars have *currently* redefined the word **myth** to include true as well as fictional, or legendary stories from the past. So they often talk about Scripture as myth and pretend they are not attacking its credibility. Postmodernism blurs history and fiction as well—placing both in the category of “story.” So TRUTH as a real category is in need of defense at present.)
- **Early in the quests, the historical skepticism took over the secular universities’ religion departments. Those departments are an inadequate place to search for spiritual truth.**

“One after another life of Jesus appeared during this (19th) Century...

“Each trying to rediscover the non-miraculous Jesus behind the supernatural figure of the gospels. ...Apparently unaware of the personal element they all brought to their research, **each writer constructed a historical Jesus after his own image**. There was Strauss’s Hegelian Jesus, Renan’s sentimental Jesus, Bauer’s non-existent Jesus, Ritschl’s liberal Jesus, and so forth....

“As one observer remarked,

- ‘Each one looked down the long well of history and saw his own face reflected at the bottom.’ The movement finally ground to a halt in skepticism, since no non-miraculous Jesus could be uncovered in the gospel traditions.”—William Lane Craig, REASONABLE FAITH, 1994 edition, p. 168.

Quest Number 1, Fact 1: More Assumptions

- Quest 1 added the dialectical method (from G. W. F. Hegel 1770-1831) to its studies.
- It broke the documents into presumed original material and “theological” material.
- It also believed that humanity was getting better and better. The horrors of World War I made this movement less credible to the public.

Quest Number 1, Fact 1:

Albert Schweitzer was the most famous of the first quest, and the man who **finished** that movement.

■ He concluded that we do not know who Jesus was, that He was a “**man unknown.**”

Christianity responded with

- ▣ the “modernist controversy” and
- ▣ the “social gospel.”

Quest Number 1, Fact 1, Results: Splits and Buzz-Words

- The Modernist Controversy: A BIG split occurred between denominations and portions of denominations—based to a large degree on acceptance or rejection of the possibility of miracle.
- Those rejecting miracles became focused on good works to help society—the social gospel.
- Those accepting miracles held to the truth of the Bible. Of course, this group did good works as well.

(Another Footnote)

- The information about the three quests comes from a speech by Gary Habermas at Biola University, available on CD, called THE HISTORICAL JESUS, and from William Lane Craig's REASONABLE FAITH, 1994 edition.

The Quests for the Historic Jesus

Facts

We can be confident in the Biblical Jesus by understanding the facts about the 3 quests for the historical Jesus.

- Fact 1: The assumptions pre-set the conclusions.
- **Fact 2: The conclusions produce reactions among the congregations.**
- **Fact 3: The Biblical documents are more helpful than the critics.**

Quest #1 Fact 2: Reactions—Even More Splits

Karl Barth responded in 1918, in his book **EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS**, that people should not seek a historical Jesus, but should take a leap of faith, and that history is not important for faith.

However, this pits faith against belief in truth, which creates a totally undefined meaning for faith.

This is an existentialist approach to faith—parallel to the existentialist philosophers' attempts to validate their lives by irrational means.

The word “existentialist”

- Has more than one meaning. Sometimes people use it to mean “existing in reality,” or “survival.” The philosophical use of the term implies *a method of finding meaning in life through irrational, emotional means.*
- People who denied miracle thought of *religious experience* as one of those means. They saw religious experience as a search for meaning in life through emotion *divorced from reason.*

Quest #1 Fact 2: Reactions

This Christian *blind* leap of faith was an UNREASONABLE leap of faith, with no history thought to back it up.

Bible-believing Christians did not need this kind of faith—they held to a faith based in the TRUTH of the Bible, miracles and all. Their leap of faith was based on believing the truth.

The response to Quest #1 *among those who rejected* the possibility of miracles was a split in thinking and a new movement called neo-orthodoxy.

Quest #1 Fact 2: Reactions

- Neo-orthodoxy accepted the modernist view that only physical reality can be known. They placed the realm of meaning and values in the irrational, emotional arena.
- They adopted an existentialist form of Christianity. They used the orthodox terminology, but without the orthodox meaning for terms. They used Christian symbols as symbols without substance.

Quest #1 Fact 2: Reactions

- Francis Schaeffer's book, *The God Who Is There* in his TRILOGY explains this religious movement in greater detail.
- Once again, a stream of Christianity remained true to the truth of the Bible.
- Because the neo-orthodox used the same words (but without defined meaning), as those believing the Bible, a split in understanding developed inside many churches. The seminaries convinced ministerial students of neo-orthodoxy, but the churches didn't think that way.

Quest #1 Fact 2: Reactions

- The people in the pews thought the neo-orthodox leaders were talking about Biblical truth—when they were really just talking about existential, irrational, emotional experiences.
- So one could see the Bible-believing Christians and the neo-orthodox (sometimes called liberal Christians—although that is a much less precise word) side by side in some churches, and the Bible believers did not know what was happening. They were hearing familiar words, but the meaning had shifted.

Quest 1, Fact 2: Reactions

- Neo-orthodoxy opened up an approach to Christianity that was “free floating” and without a foundation. It turned the meaning of the word “faith” into its opposite.
- Faith means to believe something is true, and then to make a commitment to that truth.
- The new meaning of faith was to “believe something even though you are sure it is not so or does not matter.”

Quest 1, Fact 2: Reactions

- This scheme says beliefs matter but facts do not matter, and that one should believe something while simultaneously believing it does not matter if it is true.
- This is a way of turning belief upside down and inside out. It is not the meaning of belief found in the Bible.
- It dilutes the meaning of faith.
- It has caused and continues to cause MUCH CONFUSION.

Quest 1, Fact 2: Reactions

- We can have compassion for people who have adopted this system of belief, because they think it is the best they can do, and they know they NEED faith. One of the blessings of the defense of the faith called apologetics: Apologetics can build a bridge to these individuals, so that they can find solid faith, objective faith that matches spiritual reality.
- If they have reached this position by searching for spiritual truth in all the wrong places, they may have to unlearn before they can learn.

Quest 1, Fact 2: Reactions

- A paradox fed the historic reactions.
- The existentialist approach created boring church services, and counseling in those situations had no real answers for very real problems.
- People left those churches in droves, and many went to churches that believed the Bible.
- Other denominations split and split and split again as the confusion continued.

Quest 1, Fact 2: Reactions

- Because the news media tends to be empty of Bible-believing Christians, they often interview people as spokesmen for Christianity who do not represent the beliefs of most Christians. They often interview the existentialist type of Christian pastors or theologians or the modernist type.
- The silence is deafening in the media-driven part of the culture regarding authentic Bible-believing Christianity.

Quest 1, Fact 2: Reactions

- Often Bible-believing pastors are unaware of the depth of skepticism in the training of pastors in other groups. The directions those other pastors take regarding issues do not seem sensible to Bible-believing pastors.
- There is a big communication gap, with each group talking past the other, and thinking the other group does not know what they are talking about.
- The field of Biblical Apologetics has the advantage of opening conversations to find out what the other groups actually think.

Quest 1, Fact 2: Reactions

- I have a sense that many young people go into ministry from a foundation of experiencing God's Presence, only to become severely discouraged by the skepticism of their seminary training. It seems to me that Biblical Apologetics as a discipline offers Bible-believing pastors the opportunity to encourage those individuals—to present reasons to believe that their early experience of God's Presence was real and valid and right—and to re-kindle their study of the Bible.

Quest 2

Used similar techniques and produced similar results.

The Quests for the Historic Jesus:

Quest #2

Facts

We can be confident in the Biblical Jesus by understanding the facts about the 3 quests for the historical Jesus.

- Fact 1: The assumptions pre-set the conclusions.
- Fact 2: The conclusions produce reactions among the congregations .
- Fact 3: The documents speak better than the critics.

Quest 2, Fact 1: Assumptions

The second quest occurred in the 1950s when scholars, students of Rudolph Bultmann, realized they needed historic information,

- ▣ but they were still trying to hold faith apart from belief in actual miracles, and
- ▣ treating miracles as unhistorical.

They treated miracle claims as totally subjective and still viewed faith as not based on history.

Quest 2, Fact 1: Assumptions

They developed redaction criticism, an effort to differentiate between original words of the Gospels and *redacted* or “edited” wording.

- ❑ Evangelicals, Bible-believing Christians, were absent from the first and second quests.
- ❑ In addition, mainstream publishing houses did not publish evangelical material, so only one side of the controversy reached academia.
- ❑ It was “separate but unequal” treatment of scholarship.

The Reaction of the Culture to the Second Quest

Was THE SIXTIES.

- People lost sight of eternal truths, and the beliefs and traditions that held Americans together started falling apart. Students began searching for spiritual truth in all the wrong places, including very dangerous emotional experiments such as drug use.
- One good thing came out of the SIXTIES and that actually came out of **Bible-believing** African American churches—the Civil Rights movement.



Quest 3 used new techniques

And has produced some mixed results.

Quest 3 Fact 1: Assumptions

- The third quest in Christian circles began in **the 1970s**, and it attempts to place Jesus' life in its historical context, particularly including the history of Jewish life in the first century.
- This quest is still going on.
- This quest includes some scholars who believe in miracles as possibilities, and is **the first quest** to accept them.

Quest 3 Fact 1: Assumptions

- Many in the third quest are calling for genre criticism, which places the textual material in its literary context.
- The third quest relies upon scholarship from Judaism in the first century and its view of Jesus. (Studies similar to the third quest began in Judaism around the turn of the twentieth century.) Those studies have been productive, because they bring the Gospels into their historic setting.

Quest 3 Fact 1: Assumptions

- Postmodernism uses genre criticism, but fails to differentiate between truth and fiction on the basis of believing everything is fictionalized, so a postmodern direction carries some dangers into the third quest.
- However, some of the viewpoint critics in the postmodern style can bring new insights to the texts. For instance, the people in third world oppression situations view portions of the gospels as realistic that had been discounted by earlier critics.

Quest 3 Fact 1: Assumptions

- If we look at the chart from the beginning of this lesson that detailed the progression of “higher” criticism, the last three sections could all be included under the third quest. So the third quest is somewhat diverse in its assumptions, and is more open to the idea of miracle than earlier quests. It also includes some critics that are very far from Bible-believing, and who use techniques such as group voting to decide what is likely to be original words in the Bible.

Higher Criticism can be broken into several different eras and methodologies.

- | | | | |
|----|--------------------------|----|---|
| 1. | Source Criticism | 1. | 1700s-1800s, Germany, JEDP, &Q, Mark, Proto-Luke |
| 2. | Form Criticism | 2. | 1918, Germany, Individual documents of OT were compiled and edited in 586 BC, post exile |
| 3. | Redaction Criticism | 3. | 1 st half of 20 th century, Differentiates between originals and “edits” by church |
| 4. | Historical Criticism | 4. | 1900s Judaism, 1970s 3 rd quest, Looks at historical setting. |
| 5. | Genre/Literary Criticism | 5. | 1970s, US, Scandinavia, Britain, Looks at the literary whole and the story and the poetry |
| 6. | Viewpoint Criticism | 6. | Present, Postmodern, Looks at the documents from the readers’ points of view: Feminist criticism, Third world criticism, Afrocentric criticism, liberation theology, etc. |

Quests and Fact 1: Assumptions drive conclusions.

- The real issue in most skepticism about the Bible is related to the assumption that God never does miracles. That assumption drives the conclusions.
- After all, if the Bible is inspired by God, (and it is!) that process of inspiration constitutes a miracle. Other miracles to confirm His authorship are consistent with inspiration.

Quests and Assumptions

- Many Christians may think the Bible is the only source of information about Jesus. Actually seventeen early non-Christian sources have been found that date within 150 years of His life.
- These sources confirm 60 facts about His life. (Dr. Gary Habermas' speech, "The Historical Jesus," Biola University.)
- The Bible confirms the same facts and more.

Quests and Fact 1: Assumptions drive conclusions.

- There is an irony here. If secular sources confirm 60 facts, and the same facts are confirmed by the Bible, but **ONLY** if you accept miracles, then the facts tend to confirm the miracles.
- If you open your mind to the possibility of miracle, the New Testament gives a clear picture of the real Jesus.
- One part of real faith is openness to miracles as possibilities, based upon the goodness of God.

Fact 2: The conclusions produce reactions from Quests 2 & 3.

A major reaction in the second half of the twentieth century was that people abandoned the churches that disbelieved in miracles

- ▣ In droves.

Many abandoned faith altogether—if it is not true, why bother?

Many others switched to Bible-believing churches.

Quest 2, Fact 2: Reactions

- Many people who left the churches because of boredom became convinced that Christianity had no answers. They started searching for spiritual answers in many wrong places. New cults formed, atheism gained followers, the New Age movement was born, and astrology, witchcraft, and Eastern Religions gained followers. People joined communes, and Atheistic Communism even gained followers in the US as people abandoned the faith.
- Later on, many gave up on looking for answers.

Fact 2: The conclusions produce reactions from Quests 2 & 3.

The reaction at present—the popular culture is abandoning Biblical Christianity.

- It is the one religion that can be ridiculed and insulted on a regular basis by the media.
- It is the one religion sure to be taken to court if it steps outside the walls of the church building.
- It is the one religion that the “wall of separation” separates from the public.

Fact 2: The conclusions produce reactions from Quests 2 & 3.

- The reaction away from Christianity is very severe among young adults, who are most tuned-in to popular culture.
- Postmodernism tends to target Christianity unfairly as a source of all the ills of America's past, while basing its own morality upon group identity and group rights. This is a form of propaganda, and it seems to cause young adults to abandon their Christian identity. That is why the study of defending the faith is so vital among young adults.

Fact 2: The conclusions produce reactions from Quests 2 & 3.

- Postmodernism defines fairness and tolerance as accepting every group's beliefs as equal, and, therefore, postmodernism dilutes the unique aspects of Christian truth. Postmodernism treats Christianity's unique claims as a form of intolerance, as something unfair to other groups.
- This is a very muddled approach to right and wrong. Because everyone has a sense of right and wrong, people can be susceptible to manipulation when their basis for moral reasoning is undermined by postmodernism.

Fact 2: The conclusions produce reactions from Quests 2 & 3.

- This points out our need to understand Postmodernism, and the need to find effective ways to resist its mistakes. That is a complex study reserved for another course—the course dealing with *Religions and Biblical Christianity*.
- A recommended sourcebook is Gene Edward Veith's *Postmodern Times*.

We can be confident in the Biblical Jesus

Facts

- by understanding the facts about the 3 quests for the historical Jesus.
- Fact 1: The assumptions pre-set the conclusions.
- Fact 2: The conclusions produce a reactions among the congregations.
- **Fact 3: The Bible documents are more helpful than the critics.**

Fact 3: The Bible documents are more helpful than the critics.

- The simple Bible-believing churches attracted followers because the documents themselves are so powerful.
- They have the ring of truth, no matter what the critics say. They are amazingly consistent with each other in a way that is unforced. Their themes reach the heart.
- And because God exists, miracles ARE possible.

We must look at miracles next time.

- God gave us the life of Christ in four parallel accounts. We can check out the facts for ourselves. He wants us to do that.
- But *if* the assumption that miracles never happen has been drilled into us, we must set it aside and read like a child before we will be able to read effectively—because the miracles will seem unreal.

Implications:

- We can gain more insight into the Real Jesus through personal Bible study than from studying the quests for the historical Jesus.
- Because Jesus really is Messiah, we can benefit in many ways through studying His book.

Implications:

- The information in support of Jesus' resurrection is much more important than any discoveries made in the quests for the historic Jesus.
- Because the fact of the resurrection is better supported than other facts of history,

Implications:

- the magnitude of that miracle makes us aware of the possibility of lesser miracles.
- So we have NO REASON to discard the Bible just because it contains miracle accounts.
- You have to read the Book! Read the entire book, and mull it over, and then read it again.

How do people outside

Bible believing churches look at miracles? We want to spend some time thinking carefully about these issues.

The 4 M's

- Materialism
- Miracle
- Magic
- Mysticism

The 4 M's: Look at all the possibilities

- **Materialism**—only the physical is real—no miracles occur or can occur.
- **Miracles** really can happen because God is real.
- **Magic** really can happen and we don't have to know why.
- **Mysticism** or human emotions explain the phenomena, and people may not be able to know if these things are real.

The 4 M's

People are prone to adopt one of four general views about miracles, the “4 M’s.” Those of us who accept a Personal Beginning generally hold to the possibility of Miracle, and to Monotheism. Those who accept an impersonal beginning usually adopt one of the other three M’s. We will cover Materialism in detail in the another course, where we will look at *God and Creation*. Today we want to look at *Mysticism versus Miracle*.



Miracle Versus

Mysticism

In our first session we discussed

- Modernism
- Postmodernism
- And Christianity.

Modernism sees religious experience as disconnected from reality, and views physical reality as the only reality.

Postmodernism sees religious experience as totally subjective, but emotionally valid.

Everyone should understand

Reasons

The difference between true religious experience and mysticism for the following reasons.

1. Postmodernism confuses the two.
2. True religious experience is based on true spiritual reality.
3. True religious experience has eternal results.

True Religious Experience versus Mysticism.

- Postmodernism attempts to equate all religious experience. It assumes all religious experience is **subjective**. It assumes that all religious experience is **equally valid**. It assumes that all religious experience is **just opinion**.
- Postmodernism's framework for understanding religion is **a framework of mysticism**.

What is mysticism? It encompasses a broad range of phenomena.

- Eastern religions have a history of mysticism.
- All of these religions tend to envision the ultimate beginning as impersonal, and the ultimate destiny of individuals as an ascent into the impersonal. They place the impersonal above personality.
- They adopt various rituals and experiences to try to “tap into” the impersonal via emotional experience.

What is mysticism?



- Sometimes the ritual involves physical sensations, such as drinking tea very slowly, or whirling in a circle.
- Forms of good works are often included—although on a “low level.”
- The impersonal ultimate of mystical religions requires that good and evil blend into one indefinable mixture at the higher level of understanding.

Mysticism varies from place to place and uses rituals.

One mystical religion may use chants.

Another may have many personal representations of impersonal gods, and may worship idols.

Another may have no gods and consider itself an atheistic religion.

One may believe in cosmic justice and reincarnation.

Another may believe death itself is an ascent into the impersonal.

Mysticism varies from place to place.

In placing **the impersonal** on a higher scale than the personal, each form reduces the meaning of individual human life.

One thinks fulfillment is found by emptying oneself of emotion.

Another may think fulfillment is found by calling up manifestations of impersonal gods.

What is mysticism?

Mysticism is

- ▣ a focus on religious experience,
- ▣ using ritual as a form of emotional experience,
- ▣ while holding that the actual internal experience **cannot be expressed in words to another person.**

Mysticism's selective subjectivity

- The emotional state is presumed to be **unrelated to logic** or the physical world.
- Eastern mystics tend to hold beliefs about the invalidity of logic **only** for religious purposes.
- When they cross the road, they don't try to cross in the identical space with the 18 wheeler. Either the 18 wheeler is really there or it is not—to paraphrase Ravi Zacharias.

From Mysticism to Postmodernism

- Mysticism holds a promise of emotional fulfillment without a base in reality or logic.
- Mystical experience claims total subjectivity.
- **Postmodernism equates all religious activity with mysticism, by assuming the emotional effect is the only spiritual reality—or that reality is created by subjectivity—that reality is only in the mind.**

Postmodernism Filters Religion Through Mysticism—

Because of a failure to realize that God really exists—

- And that we can find out about Him.

Because we can find Him and learn His opinions, we can have **real religious experience that matches objective reality**. We can even talk about it. It isn't just subjective emotionalism.

- God is real. His objective reality is ultimate reality.

True religious experience is based on true spiritual reality.

- This brings us to the Four Spiritual Laws – reproduced in McDowell's book.
- Just as there are physical laws that proceed from the Mind of God and which govern the universe,
- There are Spiritual Laws that proceed from the Character of God and that govern the moral realm.
- The next few slides elaborate on those laws.

We need to understand His Spiritual Laws to live appropriately.

1. **God loves us** and has a plan for our lives.
2. **God's Moral Laws** are an important sub-set of the four spiritual laws. When people fail to keep God's Moral Laws, they become morally separated from God. Eventually, God's justice will require that they be judged.
3. God does **not** want us **to stay separated** from Him, so He provided a way to take the punishment for our wrongdoing in our place.
4. We can return to a close fellowship with God **by accepting His payment for our sins.**

Everyone can find true faith and true religious experience

God's Requirements for us

By trusting in the real God who is there, and meeting His requirements.

1. Repent of sins.
2. Believe in His atonement for those sins.
3. Receive His forgiveness.
4. Receive His Holy Spirit.

1. Repent of sins.

The physical laws which govern the universe are obeyed automatically.

The moral laws that proceed from God's character have one significant difference: people can and do choose to break them.

Any time a person breaks God's moral law, even in the mind by coveting something that is not his, that is sin.

The Moral Law—Summarized from Exodus chapter 20

You shall have no other gods before God.

You shall make no idols.

You shall respect God's name. You shall not use His name trivially.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Honor your father and your mother.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness.

You shall not covet.

The Law Behind the Law

- You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.
- You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Everybody sins.

- Even if one manages to keep most of the big ten, he still needs to face the law behind the law.
- If he loves God, he will be sorry for anything that separates him from God.
- Repentance requires being sorry for sins, being willing to stop, and asking for help to do what is right.

2. Believe in His atonement for those sins.

Jesus' death on the cross reveals the seriousness of sin. His gift of His own life for us was infinite, and able to pay for all sins for all people for all time. Jesus' innocent death in our place satisfies the requirements of eternal justice.

1 Peter 2:24 “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.”

2. Believe in His atonement for those sins.



Jesus proved His power over sin and death by coming back to life for us. We can believe it because it is true.

3. Receive His forgiveness.

Receive His forgiveness by telling God in prayer that you are sorry for your sins, that you believe Jesus died to take away your sins, and that He rose victorious for you.

Silently name any serious sin you have done to God, agreeing with His definition of it as sin. It may help to make a mental list of all the things you want Him to take away, and ask Him to forgive each item. And then ask Him to take away any more that you have not mentioned.

Ask God to forgive you. He paid that huge price for you because He wants to forgive you.


4. Receive His Holy Spirit into your life.

Ask Him to send His Holy Spirit into your heart, to transform you and give you the power to do what is right—and to see what is right in difficult situations.

He is the King of the Universe and King of Heaven and King of all eternity.

When He comes into your life, He enters as King.

True Religious Experience Has Eternal Results.



When Jesus takes away your sins, they are gone forever. Your fellowship with God extends past this life and into eternity.

Because Jesus rose from the grave, we can know that we have eternal life from Him.

JOHN 6:67-68

Jesus said therefore to the twelve, “You do not want to go away also, do you?”

Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.”

Homework: Class10 Set 1

- Read John 3: 16-21.
- What does this passage say is necessary before searching for the light of God?
- What is the contrast for those who do not practice truth?
- Read Chapter 20 in **THE NEW EVIDENCE THAT DEMANDS A VERDICT.**
- Obviously the documentary hypothesis is full of holes. What are some of the consequences of believing it?

Homework: Class10 Set 1

- What role do you think human sin nature might play in the willingness to believe the documentary hypothesis, since it is obviously flawed and discredited? Bear in mind that it is still taught in some theological circles.

Homework: Class 10 Set 2

- Read John 20:29-31 and John 10: 37-38.
- What purposes are recorded in these verses for the miracles Jesus did?
- Read Chapters 27 and 28 in THE NEW EVIDENCE THAT DEMANDS A VERDICT.
- The form critics are critics of the New Testament. List some of the assumptions they bring to their study.
- (Note that pericope is pronounced per-ick-o-pee.)

Homework: Class10 Set 2

- One implication of assuming the early church made up the gospels, is assuming they had **their own power or success** in mind. Do their experiences support that assumption? If the early church had been so intent on creating helpful materials, why is there no record of a fragment that says it is fine to worship the Caesar as long as you don't really mean it, since that would have saved many lives?
- Since the form critics claim the early church was non-literary, yet capable of fictionalizing all the accounts, isn't this a form of "having it both ways?"

Homework: Class 10 Set 2

- Do the form critics all agree in their decisions about which fragments of the gospels are historical?
- According to Peritz, what is the one thing the critics do agree upon?

Homework: Class 10 Set 2

- Herod Agrippa II was present at one of the Apostle Paul's trials. He was the grand nephew of Herod Antipas, who tried Jesus, and great grandson of Herod the Great who murdered the little children around Bethlehem in an attempt to kill the infant Jesus. He was son of Herod Agrippa I who ordered the death of the apostle James, brother to the Apostle John who wrote the Gospel of According to John.
- At Paul's trial, in the book of Acts, Paul told Herod Agrippa II, when talking about Jesus and His followers, that "*these things were not done in a corner.*" Would Herod Agrippa II have been likely to understand what Paul was talking about?

Homework: Class 10 Set 2

- Since Paul was speaking to an authority with a family history of misapplication of the death penalty, and also one who knew the history of some of the main characters in the early church, would Paul have been likely to tell the truth at his trial? Does his testimony at trial sound “non-literary?”
- Incidentally, Paul was educated by one of the great religious teachers of history, Gamaliel, who in turn had been taught by Hillel.
- Do the form critics accept the testimony of early church authorities such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, and Papias?

Homework: Class 10 Set 2

- If a group claims to have a method of determining ancient history, yet accuses all the early records of being unhistorical, how accurate do you think the history they create—two thousand years after the fact—will be?

Homework: Class 10 Set 2

- A note to update this chapter: New Testament Criticism in the 21st century is beginning to focus on the roots of Christianity in Judaism. By placing events in their appropriate setting, the critics such as N. T. Wright are beginning to gain confidence in the New Testament record. Some evangelicals are participating in the new critical studies, with success. Useful references include *Fabricating Jesus* by Craig A. Evans and *Reinventing Jesus* by Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace.

Homework: Class 10 Set 3

- Read Colossians 2: 8-10 and II Corinthians 10:5, I John 1:1-4 and II Peter 1:16-21.
- Which does the Bible treat as more valuable, eyewitness accounts about Jesus' life, or philosophy and speculation and clever tales?
- As we saw in earlier lessons, we have very good reasons to believe the Bible was written by participants and eyewitnesses, or was authenticated by participants such as the Apostle Peter, who gave his recollections to John Mark.

Homework: Class 10 Set 3

- We have good evidence of the authors' original words for about 99% of the Greek New Testament.
- Read Chapters 29 and 31 in **THE NEW EVIDENCE THAT DEMANDS A VERDICT.**
- If theologians dismiss all the early records of Jesus' life as fictionalized, how is it possible for them to discover the "historical" Jesus?

Homework: Class 10 Set 3

- What are the assumptions of the Jesus Seminar?
- What problems of logic show up in the Jesus Seminar's work?
- What details from ancient inscriptions and manuscripts have been recently discovered that support the historical precision of Luke's writing?
- Briefly summarize C. S. Lewis' four "bleats" against the form critics and their followers.

Jesus Christ said,

*“If you abide (**STAY**) in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”—John 8:31b-32*